Justification or Forgiveness?—
Jesus’ Answer to Pelagianism

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I Introduction

No one who studies Christianity and Judaism today should say that the difference between these two are that while Christians believe that human beings are to be saved by faith and love of God, Jewish people are legalistically trying to work out their own salvation by works of the law. It is now wrong to categorically set Judaism as the rigorous religion of the law and justice against Christianity as the religion of love and faith. Not only Christians but Jewish people also believe in God as the god of mercy and lovingkindness (缦缦缦缦),

while legalism, too, is seen not only in Judaism but also in Christianity throughout history. The belief that the righteous people who observe the law—that is, in the case of Jewish and Christian traditions, the Mosaic law—better than others would be justly saved prior to others was widespread in the first century Jewish society, and having great influence on the newly emerging Christian society, too. Against such belief among Christians, St. Paul wrote:

2:16 Yet knowing that a human being is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, we, too, have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law: since by works of the law no flesh shall be justified.[...] 5:11 Now it is obvious that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident: for, “The righteous shall live by faith.” (Galatians 2:16 & 3:11)

Paul was here writing to the Churches in Galatea. And the fact that Paul had to set out Christian understanding of “justification by faith” shows that the Galatians then were trying to work out their own salvation by merit.

In this paper, we shall see that in Christianity, too, there has been a perennial tension between “justification by faith” and “justification by work” ever since the days of the early Christian Church. We shall first consider how the idea of “justification by work”, that is justification by merit, came into Christianity, and survey its history in Christianity. After that, we shall go on to clarify Jesus’ view as to whether human beings are to be justified by work, and shall see if Pelagianism can be compatible with Jesus’ teaching. In order to do so, we shall discuss especially three of his parables: First, the parable of
Pharisee and the tax-collector in Luke 18:9-11, which is directly dealing with the matter of merit and justification; secondly, the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32, which impressively expresses Jesus' idea concerning forgiveness and "justification"; and then, the parable of the labourers in the vineyard, which shows that the grace of God is no less given to those who has not done much amount of work.

II Background—From the Old Testament to "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification" (1999)

It may seem simply natural for any human being to expect and/or wish that righteousness is to be rewarded, if not in this world, at least in the world to come or in heaven. Yet, in the Jewish and Christian traditions, this expectation has more than natural ground—In Deuteronomy 11:26-29, God promises blessing in every aspects of life to those who "love the LORD your God, and keep his charge, his statutes, his ordinances, and his commandments always." (Deuteronomy 11:1).

28:1 And if you obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments which I command you this day, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. 2 And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God. 3 Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. 4 Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, and the fruit of your ground, and the fruit of your beasts, the increase of your cattle, and the young of your flock. 5 Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading-trough. 6 Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out. [...] 15 "But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command you this day, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. 16 Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field. 17 Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading-trough. 18 Cursed shall be the fruit of your body, and the fruit of your ground, the increase of your cattle, and the young of your flock. 19 Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out. [etc...] (Deuteronomy 28:1-19, cf. 28:1-68, also cf. 11:26-19)

And if one believes this promise of God, it would be natural that the one should expect that a person who admirably abides by the law would surely be blessed, and rewarded. We see a lot of examples of this line of thought in the Book of Proverb (2:7-8; 3:32-35 and especially a lengthy part of 10:6-12:28), which is one of the most popularly read books in the Old Testament.

Therefore, piously law-abiding Jews must have been regarded as the first to be saved.
On the other hand, those who were unable to observe the law either because of their physical or moral weakness or because of their profession were, although there was a system of sin-offering in the Temple to relieve their guilt, still, when conscious of their transgressions, likely to suffer from fear and guilty feelings, and wonder why God made them so weak. In IV Ezra (= 4 Esdras), written probably toward the end of the first century\(^8\), we see such question, or cry, to God:

7:45 “O sovereign Lord, I said then and I say now: Blessed are those who are alive and keep thy commandments! But what of those for whom I prayed? For who among the living is there that has not sinned, or who among men that has not transgressed thy covenant? And now I see that the world to come will bring delight to few, but torments to many. For an evil heart has grown up in us, which has alienated us from God, and has brought us into corruption and the ways of death, and has shown us the paths of perdition and removed us far from life—and that not just a few of us but almost all who have been created!” (4 Esdras 7:45-48(RSV))

As IV Ezra was written after the destruction of the Temple, after sin offering became no longer possible, we expect the writer’s fear of damnation is all the more keen and the question more urgent than before. However, the same sort of fear and question may have existed already at the time of Jesus, otherwise his message of the salvation of sinners would not have been accepted by so many people as a gospel, or good news. This shows how seriously the people were thinking it vital to observe the law. The awareness of the universal human weakness is especially strongly seen in Paul, the evangelist, and this awareness must have already lied in his deep consciousness since before he converted to Christianity, and become one of the powerful motivations for his conversion. When he was persecuting Christians, he was, as a Pharisee, keeping the law so rigorously as to be able to write later, “as to the righteousness which is in the law, I was blameless” (κατὰ δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐν νόμῳ γενόμενος ἀμέτροτος) (Philippians 3:6). Yet, after the conversion, he came to emphasize that human endeavour to be righteous can never be perfect enough to make one justified before God. “There is no one righteous, not a single one” (Romans, 3:10). And hence, he came to his understanding of “justification by faith”: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, but are freely justified by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans, 3:23-24).

Still, however, the tendency to encourage work in order to attain salvation persisted in the Christian tradition and never died out. Even in the New Testament epistles written in the name of Paul himself, we find a notion that a good Christian should necessarily be morally perfect, and blameless even to meet the standard of the outer, secular world. It is even written as if the good life were a condition of the eternal life.

\(^6\) But as for you, man of God,[…] pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love,
steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith: *take hold of the eternal life* to which you were called when you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. (2 Timothy 6:11-12) (Italics mine)

But as for you, teach what is proper with sound doctrine.  Bid the older men be temperate, serious, sensible, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. The older women likewise to be reverent in behaviour, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink but to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be sensible, chaste, domestic, kind, and submissive to their husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. Likewise urge the younger men to be sensible. In all things show yourself a model of good deeds, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity, and sound speech that cannot be censured, so that an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say about us.[...] awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds. (Titus 2:1-14) (Italics mine)

These epistles were actually not by Paul but later composition; and we see here a movement away from the genuine Paul's argument of justification by faith.

In the history of the Church, the idea of justification by work can be seen perhaps most manifestly in Pelagianism, originated from a 4th century British monk Pelagius, who came to Rome. According to Pelagius, human beings are completely free to choose either good or evil, and "it is on this choice between two ways, on this freedom to choose either alternative, that the glory of the rational mind is based, it is in this that the whole honour of our nature consists, it is from this that its dignity is derived and all good men win others' praise and their own reward." He argues that human beings were not only given the free will but also endowed with enough power to fulfil all the commandments of God, and there is no excuse for anyone not to do that. It is wrong to wish "man ought to have been so made that he [or she] could do no evil at all." He says,

[...] with a proud and casual attitude of mind, in the manner of good-for-nothing and haughty servants, we cry out against the face of God and say, 'It is hard, it is difficult, we cannot do it, we are but men, we are encompassed by frail flesh.' What blind madness! What unholy foolhardiness! We accuse God of a twofold lack of knowledge, so that he appears not to know what he has done, and not to know what he has commanded: as if, forgetful of the human frailty of which he is himself the author, he has imposed on man commands which he cannot bear. And, at the same time, oh horror!, we ascribe iniquity to the righteous and cruelty to the holy, while complaining, first, that he has commanded something impossible, secondly, that man is to be amend
by him for doing things which he was unable to avoid, so that God—and this is something which even to suspect is sacrilege—seems to have sought not so much our salvation as our punishment!\textsuperscript{12)}

This may appear to be a sincere trust in God, showing impeccable readiness to obey God’s commandment. However, as B.B. Warfield points out, this position, when pushed through, not only will lead to legalism but even to “a sort of deism”. For, what this really holds is: “God had endowed His creature with a capacity (possibilitas) or ability (posse) for action, and it was for him [or her] to use it. Man was thus a machine, which, just because it was well made, needed no Divine interference for its right working: and the Creator, having once framed him [or her], and endowed him [or her] with the posse, henceforth leaves the velle and the esse to him [or her].”\textsuperscript{13)}

Moreover, it can lead to competition with others to weigh one’s own righteousness by how virtuous a life one is leading: as Pelagius himself advises, “take care that no one surpasses you in the good life, no one excels you in moral purity, no one wins a place above you in the pursuit of virtue.”\textsuperscript{14)} Against Pelagius, Augustine of Hippo emphatically argues that the salvation is brought by God’s grace which does not depend on how much one is abiding by God’s commandments. Although Augustine himself also holds that human beings are given free will in order to obey God freely, he believes that human beings have fallen through misuse of the free will and disobedience to God.\textsuperscript{15)} He does not think it possible for human beings to choose only the good as to be able to attain their own salvation by their own efforts. He also believes that God created the world ex nihilo, and because human beings were created from nothing, they were inevitably imperfect and cannot be absolutely free from evil.\textsuperscript{16)} Quoting Pelagius’s words: “God gives all graces to him who has been worthy to receive them,” Augustine argues that “the very name of grace and the meaning of its name are taken away if it is not given gratuitously but is received by him who is worthy of it.”\textsuperscript{17)} Augustine stresses that “although faith obtains for us the grace to do good works, yet certainly we do not merit by any faith that we should have faith itself; rather, in giving faith to us, in which we follow the Lord, his mercy has gone before us.”\textsuperscript{18)}

Although Pelagius was sentenced as heretical by the Church at the Synod of Carthage (418), his view of salvation and justification by work kept on having strong influence in Christianity. It is well known that Martin Luther’s reformation movement was triggered by the contemporary Church’s indulgence scheme, which was based on the idea of salvation by work: Anthony Lane, in his comparative study on the notion of “justification by faith” in Catholicism and Protestant, suggests a tendency that in the Catholic tradition where people were baptized when they were born, “the free gift of justification becomes part of the Christian’s prehistory, further back than can be remembered. The reality of the Christian life becomes one of performing good works to attain the reward of eternal life and being threatened with penances, satisfactions and (ultimately) purgatory for any sins
committed.” When people as Christians commit sins, they need to repent and through the sacrament of penance, to be restored. “Through the sacrament of penance the eternal punishment due to mortal sin is waived—i.e. the penitent is no longer destined for hell. But there remains a temporal punishment to be paid”. Those who have sinned have to “offer God some compensation or ‘satisfaction,’ which can be done by fasting, almsgiving or some other ‘meritorious activity’.” Indulgences, originally given to those who did such virtuous work as fighting for the Christendom, came to be bought when paying itself for the indulgences came to be counted as a meritorious work. 19

As Lane reminds us, when we discuss “justification by work/ justification by merit,” we have to distinguish the issue of merit before justification and that of merit after justification.

As to the first question, about the merit before justification, not only Protestants but Catholics, too, in their official pronouncement of the Council of Trent (1545-1564), rejected the idea that anything that precedes justification could merit the grace of justification. The Council declares “On Justification” thus:

CANON I.—If any one saith, that man may be justified before God by his own works, whether done through the teaching of human nature, or that of the law, without the grace of God through Jesus Christ; let him be anathema.

CANON II.—If any one saith, that the grace of God, through Jesus Christ, is given only for this, that man may be able more easily to live justly, and to merit eternal life, as if, by free will without grace, he were able to do both, though hardly indeed and with difficulty; let him be anathema. 20

This way, Catholics, likewise as Protestants, reject the idea of merit as a means to get salvation. Only, the Catholic tradition uses the term “grace”, in the almost same context as when the Protestant talks of “faith alone.”

The issue of merit after justification involves two different issues. First, whether there can be any merit in the sense that we human beings can achieve something independently of God, and secondly, even if we affirm our total dependence upon God’s grace in order to perform good works, whether these work are still meritorious. What is their value before God? And as to these issues, too, basically neither tradition see merits as a means of getting salvation, while neither of them totally reject the idea of merit after the justification. Lane remarks, on the one hand, that “Augustine [whom Lane quotes as the representative of Catholic thought] believed that our good works are meritorious, but also believed that these works are wholly the fruit of God’s grace. As he famously put it, when God crowns our merits he crowns his own gifts. E.g. Grace and Free Choice 6:15.” 21 On the other hand, Protestants, too, admit at least some value in works: “If we say that our works have no value, are we not saying that becoming a Christian has made no difference, are we not belittling the work of the Holy Spirit? The doctrine of ‘double justification’, of
God’s gracious acceptance and rewarding of our works in Christ, can safeguard the other side of the biblical tension.” 22)

Today, although there are still some significant differences between Catholic and Protestant, such as about the doctrine of sanctification and the sacrament of penance, they have reached the core agreement about the doctrine of justification. On 31 October 1999, the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation signed the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (1999). In its third section, ‘The Common Understanding of Justification’ (§§14-18), they set out their shared convictions thus:

Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works. (§15)23)

This understanding of justification, especially, that “we are accepted by God,” by grace and in faith, so as to be equipped and called “to good works” is relevant and important. For, in any case, it is undeniable that Jesus enjoins active work (cf. for example, Luke 10:37), and himself does a lot of work of consolation (Luke 10: 36-50, etc.), healing (passim) and helping the people in need (Mark 6:39-44, et par., etc.). However, all those works are NOT to be done for one’s own justification, as merits, but to be done for others, for the distressed, the sick, or for the needy. But discussion on those works should need a lot of space and beyond our scope in the present small paper.

In the following, we shall go back and refer to Jesus’ own words as are recorded in the Gospels, and consider how he sees “Justification” of human beings in relation to God.

III Jesus

1 The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax-Collector (Luke 18:9-14)

This parable is often interpreted as showing contrast of a proud self-righteous one and a humble sinner, who cannot expect salvation if one cannot be saved without observing all the law.

189 He [Jesus] spoke also this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised the others. 10 “Two men went up to the temple to pray. The one a Pharisee and the other a tax-collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, was thus praying, “God, I thank thee that I am not like the other people, greedy, unjust, adulterous, or even like this tax-collector. 12 I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get. 13 But the tax-collector, standing far off, would not even raise his eyes to heaven. He was beating his breast, saying, “God, be merciful to me, the sinner.” 14 I say to you, this man went down to his home justified, rather than that man, for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and who humbles himself will
be exalted. (Luke 18:9-14)

The prayer of the Pharisee in Jesus’ parable shows the same mentality as we saw in the Pelagius’s words above: “take care that [...] no one wins a place above you in the pursuit of virtue.” As Bruce Larson remarks, “The man who said, ‘I am not like other men: I fast: I give tithes’ seemed to see God as a big corporation in which he owned a large lock of stock.” He thinks that the better than others he did, the more share of the stock of heaven he will get. So the Pharisee in the parable is mistaken to regard his uprightness as merited through his own effort and work. And worse still, with this competitiveness, he has forgotten what is taught in Judaism—and also enjoined by Jesus (Mark 12:33-34 et par.) —as the most important commandment to love your neighbour (Leviticus 19:18).

It is reported that, in the first century, there was a “problem of the proud man standing aloof in worship.” In The Assumption of Moses, an intertestamental book, and regarded as written perhaps during the lifetime of Jesus, we see very sharp criticism against the contemporary religious leaders:

And though their hands and their minds touch unclean things, yet their mouth shall speak great things, and they shall say furthermore: “Do not touch me lest thou shouldst pollute me in the place (where I stand)” (7:9-10).

Against such background, this parable is understandable as Jesus’ criticism of the proud religious pietists. It is also in harmony with the advice by the renowned teacher Rabbi Hillel, who is reported to have said in the 1st century, “Keep not aloof from the congregation and trust not in thyself until the day of thy death, and judge not thy fellow until thou art thyself come to his place” (Mishna, Pirke Aboth 2:5).

The verse 11, which goes in the Greek as “ὁ Φαρισαῖος σταθεὶς πρὸς ἑαυτὸν παῦειν προσήνεστο” can be translated two ways, according as whether to interpret the clause πρὸς ἑαυτὸν as adverbial of προσήνεστο (prayed) or adverbial of σταθεὶς (standing). Most of the main English translations interpret as former, such as “The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself” (NAS), “said this prayer to himself ” (NJB), “prayed thus with himself” (RSV, KJV, NKJ), “was praying this to himself” (NAU), “prayed about himself” (NIV); while New Living Translation (NLT) takes as the latter and goes as “stood by himself and prayed this prayer.” I find this translation better, for this is adequately showing the Pharisee’s aloofness. The above translation of mine: “The Pharisee, standing by himself, was thus praying” is based on this, and also intending to reflect the form of σταθείς (participle) and προσήνεστο (imperfect). The Pharisee (as is fit this title, which comes from the word “phârash,” to distinguish, or separate), is not only separating himself from the others psychologically, but also physically, in order to avoid contact with others, especially those who are regarded as unclean. I agree with Bailey to see his reason of standing alone as:
The Pharisee’s reasons for standing apart can be easily understood. He considers himself righteous and indeed “despises others,” [...] Furthermore, there was a particular type of uncleanness that was contracted by sitting, riding, or even leaning against something unclean (Danby 795). This uncleanness was called midras-uncleanness. The Mishna specifically states, “For Pharisees the clothes of an am haaretz count as suffering midras-uncleanness” (Mishna Hagigah 2:7, Danby 214). With this background in mind it is little wonder that the Pharisee wanted to stand aside from the rest of the worshipers. 27

The Pharisee’s prayer of gratitude as to his capacity to observe the law may be sincere, as was the case with Pelagius, but still, because he is not asking God any mercy or forgiveness here in the temple, he is accordingly not to be granted any of such here. His relation with God has not changed this day in the temple.

However, some of Jesus’ audience may have taken this parable differently. For, this parable may have been paradoxical to them at least two ways.

First, it would have been contrary to their expectation that the tax-collector, rather than the Pharisee, would be justified. In the day of Jesus, as they are now, Pharisees were well known for their religious sincerity. And in the light of the assurance by God in Deuteronomy, it must have been taken for granted that those who, as the Pharisee in Jesus’ parable, were observing the law felt sure that they were “good” and “right” in God’s eyes. As Brad H. Young points out, other people would, far from criticising them as hypocrites, respect them “for their sincere religious piety.” He remarks, “John Crossan captures the essence of the problem when he suggests a humorous modern equivalent, ‘A pope and a pimp went into St. Peter’s to pray’. The contrast between a pope, who is naturally considered holy, and a pimp, who is obviously unholy, drives home the point of just how unexpected the behavior is for the leading roles in this drama.” 28

Secondly, if Young’s above remark is correct, Jesus’ way of depicting the Pharisee here is distortedly exaggerated. Then what is the point of this exaggeration? First, we have to remember that the introduction, “He [Jesus] spoke also this parable to some who trust in themselves that they were righteous and despised the others” is Luke’s reduction. And although in this context, these “some” are easily identified with the Pharisee in the parable, and since according to the Gospel accounts Jesus’ audience was often mixtures of Pharisees, the poor, and those who were regarded as sinners (cf. e.g. Mark 2: 1-12 et par.; 2:15-16 et par., Luke 15:1-2), some Pharisees were among Jesus’ audience and Jesus may have been addressing to them, we never know those Pharisee were really so sure of themselves. Rather, if they were in fact seriously and conscientiously trying to observe the law as hard as they could, they might not be so sure of themselves. For, those who were most devoted to be observant about the law might be those who were feeling their own insufficiency keenly—as we have seen how Paul, while boasting himself as impeccable
as to the law, still inwardly recognized insufficiency of himself. Such awareness of self-insufficiency can co-exist with their aloofness towards others: They were possibly despising others, and by comparing themselves with those “sinners” around them, trying to get reassured they were “better.” Feeling themselves better would be a means to feel sure that they should be “justified” before God. But I doubt if they really succeeded to get self-confident so surely.

In that case, this parable, by revealing to them their own hidden mentality in an exaggerated form, would have worked on them as a message: “Give up trying to get justification by your merit. You do not have to be perfect, or even to pretend to be able to be perfect in terms of the law. Just admit your insufficiency and ask God’s mercy. Then you will be accepted by God.”

The point of this parable may be, then, not to criticize the Pharisees’ way of living as a whole, nor to deny the custom of fasting or offering tithes as such—Jesus is not against fasting nor offering the tithes, as is shown in Matthew 6:17-18; Mark 2:19 et par. Mark 12:42-44 et par.—but to point out the wrong motive of pietism. In our current usage, the word “Pharisaism” is sometimes defined even in the dictionary as “Hypocritical observance of the letter of religious or moral law without regard for the spirit: sanctimoniousness” 29, but it is a dangerous mistake to presume that such legalism is only seen in Judaism, or even especially in Pharisees.

In this parable, in contrast to this Pharisee, the tax-collector was justified (δικαίωμα) this day. Many of the commentators interpret this as because his humbleness was justified rather than the proud attitude of the Pharisee. However, here again, Bailey helps us to understand the true meaning of his justification. Bailey calls our attention to the fact that the tax-collector’s prayer Ἰάσον με, which has been translated as “Have mercy on me” is using different words from ἔλεγον με, which is common Greek phrase for “Have mercy on me”, and which is used later in the same chapter of Luke’s Gospel. Bailey remarks that the “word Ἰάσομαι occurs as a verb only here and in Hebrews 2:17. As a noun it appears four times (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:5; I John 2:2; 4:10), and it clearly refers to the atonement sacrifice.[...] The tax collector is not offering a generalized prayer for God’s mercy. He specifically yearns for the benefits of an atonement.[...] There in the temple this humble man, aware of his own sin and unworthiness, with no merit of his own to commend him, longs that the great dramatic atonement sacrifice might apply to him. The last stanza tells us that indeed it does.” 30 Thus, the tax-collector is atoned not because of the merit even of his humbleness. Rather, his prayer, which comes from the painful consciousness of his sinfulness—striking his chest instead of taking quiet posture of prayer shows his agony 31—, is heard by God.

This parable, addressing differently to the self-righteous religious leaders, to those who were trying to get reassurance by keeping the law and approving themselves as better than the others if not perfect, and to those who were suffering from the consciousness of being sinners, tells that after all, salvation comes not because of any merit but by God’s
2 The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)

When we see Jesus’ parables, we notice that in them, “justification” is not shown as the approval of any merit on the part of man. Rather, “to be justified” by God is shown to be redeemed by God’s grace into the right relationship with God. It is most clearly shown in the three parables in Luke Chapter 15, where it is God that takes initiative in the salvific work, to reach out and come to find and retrieve the lost ones.

The last of the three, so called “the parable of the prodigal son,” or rather, the parable of the two lost sons and the father, shows this most vividly.

A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to the father, “Father, give me the part of property that falls to me. So he divided the property to them. And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything and left to a distant country, and there wasted his property with loose living. And when he has spent all, there occurred a great famine in that country and he began to be in want. And he went to join one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him to his field to feed pigs. And he desired to fill himself with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him. Then, he came to himself and said, “How many hired servants of my fathers have more than enough bread, but I am here dying of hunger. I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me as one of your hired servants.’” And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” But the father said to his servants, “Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and give a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For, this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate. Now his elder son was in the field; and as coming and drawing near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the boys and began to ask what these things might be. And he said to him, “Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has got him back safe and sound.” But he was angry and would not go in. So his father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, “Look, for so many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!” And he said to him, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.”
In reading the story of the younger son, that is the first half of this parable, it should be noticed that it is not because he really repented that he has decided to come back to his father and that his father receives him back before he repents. When he has come to himself and realized he should go home if he wants to survive, he does not really repent. As Kenneth Bailey points out, the words he has prepared in his mind is a quotation from Exodus10:16, where the Pharaoh says to Moses and Aaron, “I have sinned against the LORD your God, and against you,” as only lip service to appease them, and Jesus’ audience would have noticed the parallel. The younger son, too, was going to say these words to his father, only to appease him to get food.32

However, even when the son is still far away from home, the father finds him and runs to him to embrace him. This is perhaps because the father has been looking for the son and probably, kept gazing at the direction from which the son might come back. In the son’s restoration, it is the father that has taken the initiative. And more significantly, in this parable, Jesus shows that the father’s care and eagerness to regain/ redeem his children is such that it even involves self-sacrifice on the father’s part to save the lost children. In the small village, all the villagers now certainly know that the son took his inheritance even before his father’s death, and soon went away to some “distant country,” which must surely be a gentile land. Not only that, they also know that he sold what he had inherited, because he sold it before he left the village, that is, in that village. As Bailey, a New Testament scholar who has many years’ actual experience of living in the Middle East, remarks, “The Middle Eastern peasant’s attachment to his land is as old as Naboth’s relationship to his vineyard.[...] the prodigal [...] certainly earned the intense displeasure of the entire community.”33

The son must have been hated and despised by the village people. And when he has come back, it must have been obvious from his clothes and his appearance that he lost all among the gentiles. In their view, the son has committed two serious sins: first, to have treated his father as if he had died before his death, which was equal to wishing his death; and second, to have lost the inheritance (including the right of the land) outside the Jewish community, transgressing God’s strict commandment to the Jewish people to keep the inheritance of their fathers (cf. Numbers 27:7-11,36:1-12; I Kings 21:3). Therefore, it wouldn’t have been surprising if the returned son had met a harsh attack from the whole village. But the father’s prompt act of reconciliation and restoration of this son has prevented such attack.

The father’s act is self-sacrificial because, for one thing, it is pointed out that in the Near-Eastern culture of Palestine, it would incur a serious loss of dignity for the respectable man to run out of the house to meet one of lower ranks and to display emotion extravagantly in public.34 In the Bible, too, it is written in its wisdom literature, “A man’s attire and [...] manner of walking, show what he is.” (Sirach 19:30): The peasants and his servants are probably watching him with curiosity. Yet, he does not mind what
they would think of him at all. Secondly, by this act of indignity, he turns the villagers’ eyes away from the son, and takes the pain himself.

In this parable, there is no justification mentioned or no atonement (in the sense of making up for one’s own sin by some meritorious works) demanded. The father just feels deep pity. The Greek word used here, σπλαγχνίζομαι (to feel compassion, mercy), deriving from the noun σπλάγχνον (the inward parts, esp. heart, lungs, liver, kidneys, which in sacrifices were reserved to be eaten by the sacrificers), shows such a strong compassionate affection as feeling pains in one’s own guts. The son’s true repentance occurs when he realizes the father’s love, when he dares not to say, “make me as one of your servants”. He must have realized that to say so would break the father-son relationship that the father is now offering to restore with him.

Yet, importantly, although his repentance was not yet sincere when he came home, it was at least true that he had realized that the only home left for him to go back was his father’s house, and this recognition was a beginning of, and a part of, true repentance—or “coming back”, as it is often used as a synonym of “repentance” in the Old Testament when used to express Israel’s turning back to Yahweh (cf. II Chronicles 30:6; Isaiah 31:6; 44:22; Jeremiah 31:12, 14:4:1; 31:22; Hosea 12:7; 14:2; Joel 12:12,13; Zechariah 1:3,4; Malachi 3:7).

Thus, Jesus’ parable here shows that God’s grace is offered from God’s side even before the repentance is not complete, and transforms that half-insincere repentance into a genuine one. From this parable, there cannot be drawn such a conclusion as Pelagius’s that God gives grace according to the people’s good work and merit.

Rembrandt, when he painted the scene of Luke 15:20, the father’s embracing of the returned son, depicted one of his hands as a female’s hand holding her son. This is his insight that this parable is showing God’s love as, like the mother’s love for her child, selfless and unconditional, as well as the father’s authoritative love that restores the lost son to his regained dignity.

Gary G. Porton points out a similar parable from Deuteronomy Rabbah (2:24) a Rabbinic literature.

Another matter: [when you are in distress because all these things have befallen you and, in the end,] return to the Lord your God [and obey him] [Deuteronomy 4:30]. Said Rabbi Samuel Pargarita in the name of Rabbi Meir: “To what can this thing be compared? [It can be compared] to a king’s son who set out on a path of depravity. The king sent his tutor after him. ‘Return my son with you.’ But the son sent him [back], and said to his father, ‘Can I return to you like this? I would be embarrassed in your presence.’ But his father sent him [back to his son] and said to him, ‘My son, should a son ever be embarrassed to return to his father? And if you return, are you not returning to your father?’ Thus, the Holy One, blessed be He, sent Jeremiah to Israel in the hour of their sinning, and he said to him, ‘Go, tell my children, you must
return.’ From where [do we learn this?] We learn it from Jeremiah 3:12], for it is said, ‘Go and proclaim these words. . . . ’ But Israel said to Jeremiah, ‘Can we return to the Holy One, blessed be He, like this?’ From where [in Scripture do we learn this? We learn it from Jeremiah 3:25], for it is said, ‘Let us lie down in our shame, let our disgrace cover us. . . . ’ But the Holy One, blessed be He, sent and said to them, ‘My children, if you return, are you not returning to your father?’ And from where [in Scripture do we learn this? We learn it from Jeremiah 31:9], for ‘I am always a father to Israel—’” (Deuteronomy Rabbah 2:24, blankets in Porton’s article). 36

This has much in common with Jesus’ point of this parable, as calling the lost sons to come back.

And in that respect, it is also important that the father here does not reject the elder son. This is not a parable in any sense to support supersessionism. To the elder son, who claims the just reward, thereby putting himself in a position of a servant rather than a son, he says, ‘Son, you[with emphatic ōl] are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.” He emphatically keeps treating the elder son as his son, and reminds the son of their fundamental, unchangeable relationship of the father-and-a-son, not the master-and-a-slave. Also, in reply to the elder son’s calling the younger son as “this son of yours,” he calls him “this brother of yours,” trying to recover the wholesome relationship in his household. He does not show even any anger at the elder son, who has objected against him in public and so has disgraced the father and their family. 37 The elder son, too, is being forgiven, though he himself does not know it nor is even realizing his offense against his father. The father’s words, “You are always with me,” is especially important when we remember that for the people of Israel (cf. Exodus 40:34-37; Numbers6:25-26; Job29:4-5) , God’s presence with them has itself been the most desirable blessing. (They expected the Messiah to be “Immanuel”—meaning “God is with us” (Matthew 1:23)). The Father’s words to the elder son are, therefore, words of promise and calling to share his blessing.

This parable is Jesus’ invitation to joy, calling both the ones who are regarded as the sinners and who are regarded as righteous, both equally need to return to God. God’s grace calls both of them to rejoice and share the merriment. Pelagius is mistaken also in this point. For, he advises the young virgin whom he is writing to:

It is well known by now to everyone and has become common knowledge how useful and necessary to this vocation of yours is the virtue of fasting and abstinence, especially at your time of life when it is easier for the body to fall prey to the onset of passion, which is why refraining from eating meat and drinking wine has been praised in the apostle’s utterance on the subject: love of chastity must avoid anything that has the power to inflame the body or supplies fuel to pleasure. 38

Jesus never recommends such asceticism. There is no room for the excessive abstinence.
(The ascetic monk in the Brother Karamazov reminds us of Pelagius, but he is never to be approved. Zosima, the elder, who eats sweets and enjoys the world, is depicted much more favourably. 39)

3 The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16)
Jesus’ message that God’s grace does not depend on the amount of achievement, or merit, on the part of human beings to receive it is seen in the parable of the labourers in the vineyard:

20:14“\textit{For the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.} \quad 2 \textit{Having agreed with the labourers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.} \quad 3 \textit{And going out about the third hour he saw others who had been standing idle in the market place;} \quad 4 \textit{and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’} \quad \textit{So they went.} \quad 5 \textit{Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same.} \quad 6 \textit{And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others having been standing;} \quad \textit{and he said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day?’} \quad 7 \textit{They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’} \quad \textit{He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’} \quad 8 \textit{And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, ‘Call the labourers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last to the first.’} \quad 9 \textit{And when those [hired] about the eleventh hour came, they received a denarius each.} \quad 10 \textit{Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but they also received a denarius each.} \quad 11 \textit{And on receiving it they grumbled at the householder, saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’} \quad 12 \textit{But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no injustice: did you not agree with me for a denarius?} \quad 13 \textit{Take what belongs to you, and go: I want to give to this last as I give to you.} \quad 14 \textit{Am I not allowed to do what I want with what is mine? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’} \quad 16 \textit{So the last will be first, and the first last.”}

In this parable, the owner of the vineyard, which Jesus compares to the kingdom of God, goes out to hire labourers for his vineyard. He goes out even five times a day, from early morning to evening, and pays the same amount of the wage, one denarius, to the last labours as well as to those who came first.

This parable is often compared with a rabbinic parable which, in a similar situation, explains the reason for the same wage as the greater efficiency of the worker who worked shortest time:

do? He took him and walked with him back and forth [through the rows of crops and did not let him finish his day's work]. Toward evening, when all the workers came to be paid, he gave him a full day's wages along with [the rest of] them. [P] The workers complained and said, "We toiled all day, and this one toiled only two hours, and he gave him a full day's wages!" [Q] The king said to them, "This one worked [and accomplished] more in two hours than you did in a whole day." [R] So R. Bun toiled in the study of the Torah for twenty-eight years, [and he learned] more than an aged student could learn in a hundred years. (Berakhot 2:7)⁴⁰

In this parable, the wages are still distributed according to the merit of the workers. However, in Jesus' parable, the landowner paid the same also to the ones who worked less. The first labourers who worked more complain against the landowner, but he insists he "want to" give all that amount, showing his eagerness to do so. The owner of the vineyard provides all who come to his vineyard with what is necessary to each. God's standard of justice comes from more fundamental care and provision for the needed. One denarius was the usual wage for the day labourers in Jesus' days in Palestine⁴¹, and so just enough to keep the labourer a day.

IV Conclusion

Jesus says, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:2-5).

In Jesus' view, all the people are sinners, and called to come back to God. God is looking for the people, coming out by himself to greet them. The Pharisee, the tax-collector, the self-righteous and those despised as sinners, are all likewise God's children and invited to come back to his house by God's grace, regardless of his or her servitude to God. Jesus is not talking any justification in the legal sense. The tax-collector and the prodigal son are received without pre-conditions. Their justification, which Jesus shows to be the restoration of the right relationship with God, is made through God's mercy and forgiveness, and this justification in turn has the power of transformation, as in the case of the younger son of the parable seen above.

Christians have to be aware the tendency of Pelagianism in their own tradition and have to keep in mind that Jesus himself was against it. To try to get justification by work, or worse still, to regard those who are not up to some "good" moral standards as "bad" Christians is wrong and mistaken. We also have seen that the justification by work is not a true teaching of Judaism, either. Both Christians and Jews alike may as well learn from Hillel, the Jewish rabbi, who respected the law perhaps more seriously than most of the Christians, told "judge not thy fellow until thou art thyself come to his place".
References

1) Marcion in the 2nd century is reported to have contrasted Judaism and Christianity and held the view “that the God proclaimed by the law and the prophets” was “righteous”, but the God of Jesus was “benevolent.” The idea behind this view is that the God of Judaism cares only for justice and if people do not obey the law, he will punish them, that the salvation soley depends on whether or not people abide by the law. Irenaeus criticized Marion for proclaiming the God of the Hebrew Bible “to be the author of evil, to take delight in war, to be inform of purpose, and even to be contrary to Himself.” Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, Latin and Greek text from Migne *PG*, Vol. 7A. Col. 687-689, ANF translation, A1.24, http://www.earlychurchtexts.com/main/irenaeus/marcion.shtml, accessed 2 July 2009). Although the contemporary Church decisively sentenced his view as a heresy, a tendency long lingered to think the God expressed in the Old Testament was a God of wrath while Jesus preached the God of Love. However, now, with the advancement of the dialogue and mutual understanding between Judaism and Christianity, such a view has been recognized as nothing more than a prejudice.


4) “Justification by faith” is the point strongly emphasized by Martin Luther, and it is reflected in Augsburg Confession (1530), the Lutheran Church’s primary confession of faith. See its “Article IV: Of Justification”:

1) Also they teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ’s sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. 3) This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight. Rom. 3 and 4. (Translation cf. http://bookofconcord.org/augsburgconfession.php, accessed on 11 Oct. 2009).

5) This argument by Paul is not to be taken as an apology of Christianity against Judaism, for Paul’s quotation is from the Hebrew Bible, יִקַּבֵּל הַרְפָּאִים פָּרַךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל ִתִּשְׁפָּר “the righteous shall live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4). Therefore, Paul’s argument “justification by faith,” has also its root in Judaism, not having been born against Judaism.

The word יִקַּבֵּל, translated in most of the English translations as “faith” also means “firmness, steadfastness (cf. *BDB*). For a significant instance, (JPS)Tanakh (1985) translates this passage, “But the righteous man is rewarded with life for his fidelity.” LXX changes Hebrew יִקַּבֵּל into his”(suffix3rd person single) to μου (my) and goes: ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἢ πίστεως μου ἡμετέρα “But the righteous shall live by my faith,” which accords Qumran’s Habakkuk Commentary (1Qp Hab [Cave 1, Qumran, pesher, Habakkuk] (cf. Michael O. Wise, Martin G. Abegg Jr., and Edward M. Cook. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation*. (San Francisco: Harper, 2005)). In
this, “my faith” is referring to God’s faithfulness, or trustworthiness, so that, it is made clear that the salvation is given by God’s grace, rather than being achieved by the righteous themselves through their merits. If so, the “justification of God” expressed here comes near to the Grace of God as the saviour.


7) It is important to remember, however, that it is not in order to be saved or rewarded that Jewish people are to obey the law. It is as a response to God who saved them from the bondage of Egypt that they love and obey the law that God gave them.


9) The tendency to allot women subservient roles to men is already seen in the Gospels. Cf. Luke 8:3 “Joanna the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, Susanna, and many others who provided for them [=Jesus and the male disciples] out of their own possessions,” where it is described as if proper female way of following Jesus were to serve and materially take care of the male disciples.


21 Lane, Justification by Faith, pp. 198-200.

22 Lane, Justification by Faith, p. 201.


25 Kenneth E. Bailey, Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach
to the Parables in Luke, combined Edition, Two Volumes in One (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1983). (Poet & Peasant (Eerdmans, 1976), Through Peasant Eyes (Eerdmans, 1980)). Quot., Through Peasant Eyes, pp. 148-149. The English quotation, which Bailey uses is from R. H. Charles, The Assumption of Moses, tr. from the Latin Sixth century Ms. (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1897), p. 28. Charles comments on this (7:3-10): “Who were the persons aimed at by the writer? They are evidently contemporaries. The picture is drawn from life.” According to Charles, they can be either (i) The Herodian princes, [..], or (ii) The Pharisees, (a) in the first decade after Herod’s death, [..] or (b) between 54-64 A.D.” (p. 23). Jonathan Tromp, in his The Assumption of Moses: A Critical Edition with Commentary (Leiden, New York & Köln: J.J. Brill, 1993), p. 207, comments, however, that “In 7:3-10 the author of As. Mos. describes the wicked men who will rule during the first stage of the eschatological events. Whether these men were actually ruling when As. Mos. was being written, or whether the author expected their rule in the (immediate) future is not clear. It can be assumed, however, that the author’s description relates to specific people, contemporaries of the author and his readers. It cannot be said, however, that his description “is drawn from life”.


However, on the other hand, Irving M. Zeitlin in his Jesus and the Judaism of His Time (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988) suggests the term ‘Pharisees’, deriving from the Hebrew Perushim, which means, literally, ‘the separated ones’ or ‘those who separated themselves’, “has nothing to do with separation from the Gentiles: nor from the alleged uncleanness of the mass of the people. There is no sign in the New Testament nor in any other contemporary source of any such separation from the masses as such. Most likely, ‘Perushim’ was an epithet hurled at the Hasidim in the Hasmonean period when they separated themselves from the Aaronite, Sadducee, priestly aristocracy. That it was their Sadducean opponents who gave the Hasidim the name of ‘separatists’ is strongly suggested by the evidence of the Mishnah where the term appears in only three passages, and in one of them issues from the mouth of a Sadducee (Mish. Yad. 4:6:8; Mish. Hag. 2:7; Mish. Sot. 3:4).” Zeitlin’s argument about the origin of the word “Pharisee” seems convincing. However, it is also likely that in the time of Jesus, or Hillel, there were at least some Pharisees, who tend to separate themselves from the others, as can be seen from the Hillel’s admonitions to them.

These “religious leaders,” who separate themselves from the others might also imply the Essenes, who, according Josephus were in “every town” in the first century and who are well known to have a strict regulation to keep themselves from any impurity. (cf. 1QS(Rule of the Community),1QM(War Scroll), 11QTemple(Temple Scroll) referred to by James H. Charlesworth, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Historical Jesus,” in James H. Charlesworth ed. Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls (New York: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 24-25).


30 Bailey, Through Peasant Eyes, p.154.


32 Kenneth E. Bailey, Jacob & the Prodigal: How Jesus Retold Israel’s Story (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 106.

33 Bailey, Poet & Peasant, p. 169.


σπλαγχνίζειν and its conjugated forms are used in the Gospels 10 times (counting parallel texts as one), all in the synoptic Gospels, of which three times are used in Jesus’ parables to express God’s deep compassion for the human beings in distress (Matt. 18:27; Lk. 10:33; and here in Lk. 15:20), in other cases, it is always used to refer to Jesus’ deep compassion for the people (Matt. 9:36, 14:14 (par Mk. 6:34), 15:32 (par Mk. 8:2), 20:34, Mk. 1:41: 9:22; Lk. 7:13). That the Gospel writers used this words, instead of more usual ἐλπίζω, meaning “take pity”, or “show mercy”, attests they see in Jesus such deep compassion that Jesus teaches as of the divine love for human beings.


38) Pelagius, “To Demetrius,” (20.2), p. 59


(本稿は二松学舎大学海外特別研究員制度により平成21年度、英国ケンブリッジ大学神学部で一年間研究する機会を与えられた成果の一部である。感謝とともにそのことを報告したい。)